

## THE MARIAN ELDRIDGE AWARD 1998 - 2009

by Christine Goode  
Co-ordinator of the Award 1998 to 2009

### Genesis of the Award

Marian Eldridge was a novelist, short story writer, poet and teacher who spent most of her creative writing years in Canberra, where *inter alia* she was instrumental in establishing the ACT Writers' Centre. In the last months of her life (she died in February 1997), she sketched out her idea of making a gift to establish a professional development award to encourage an aspiring writer to undertake a literary activity such as a short course of study, or to complete a project, or attend a writers' week or a conference. She said that the recipient should not be established but someone whose writing showed promise, and that the writing need not be fiction.

Marian's notes about the award also stated:

*I would like the award to be in the form of a cheque... and also something lasting such as a carved wooden pencil holder like the one I own...Each pencil holder, carved from Australian wood and suitably inscribed, would of course remain the property of its recipient*

In the months following her death, her husband Ken Eldridge, daughter Elizabeth Eldridge and daughter-in-law Ann Foley, worked with the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) to agree the terms of funding and the administrative arrangements for the Award. NFAW has broad objectives of advancing the rights and interests of Australian women in all spheres of life; and it supports a range of projects through its *preferred donor funds*. This enables a partner women's organisation or a group of individuals to make tax deductible donations to NFAW, expressing the preference that their donation be used to support a particular project or purpose, that project or purpose having first been approved by the NFAW Board after assessing it against NFAW's own objectives.

In March 1998 Ken Eldridge made a donation of \$10,000 to NFAW, with which NFAW established a Preferred Donor Fund for the Marian Eldridge Award for an aspiring woman writer. Since then the NFAW has administered the funds, investing them, crediting interest to the fund, receiving and receipting other donations into the fund, and deducting a small administrative charge. During 1998 and 1999 efforts were made to attract other donations, and in 2004 the fund stood at over \$16,000, notwithstanding 5 awards of \$1,000 having been made to that point.

The administrative arrangements agreed were that an Advisory Group selected by Marian's family would decide each year on guidelines for applicants and would assess applications and select the recipient of the Award. NFAW would disseminate the guidelines, receive and schedule applications, distribute a copy of all applications to the Advisory Group; and then notify applicants of the result and arrange presentation of the award. Christine Goode, a member of NFAW, volunteered to handle this

administrative work on behalf of NFAW, and has done so throughout the life of the Award.

### **Launch**

In May 1998, the Marian Eldridge Award was launched at a function hosted by Senator the Hon Margaret Reid, President of the Senate in her Senate suite. Both Margaret and the Hon Barry Jones AO MP were guest speakers at the function, which was attended by close to 100 people, and helped attract further donations to the fund.

### **The Marian Eldridge Award Advisory Group**

During 1997 and 1998 Marian's family deliberated on how the Award would be decided and invited literary colleagues and close family friends to join an inaugural advisory group which met twice in 1998, once for preliminary discussions before the launch and again later in 1998 to assess the applications for the inaugural Award. This Advisory Group consisted of George Brownbill (friend of Marian), Ann Foley (daughter in law and literary executor), Robert Hefner (Literary Editor of the Canberra Times), Dorothy Johnston (writer and member of Canberra's Seven Writers), Lizz Murphy (poet). They decided that the Award would be up to \$1000 and it would be open to applications from aspiring women writers resident in the ACT and NSW. The guidelines, which they developed, asked applicants to provide a brief outline of their literary activities, plans for the future, reasons for applying and how they intended to use the award. They were asked to attach examples of their writing not exceeding five pages in total, and could provide up to three personal references or any independent assessment of their work. Fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama and screenplays were all accepted. The guidelines were revised each year by the advisory group and the NFAW.

The group also developed a set of four criteria as a broad guide for short-listing and selection of the award recipient: quality and appeal of the writing; potential of the writer or written work (this criterion recognized that the award is for an aspiring writer who may still be developing skill but is demonstrating promise); reason for applying for the award (this criterion addressed an applicant's overall writing activities and their own assessment of their developing literary path); and intended use of the award.

Advisory group members utilised the criteria in different ways in that year and subsequent years. Some used a ranking such as a mark out of 5 and others used them for more qualitative assessments. Each member prepared for the meeting individually and presented their shortlist and reasons to the group at a face-to-face meeting. The selection of the recipient and highly commended applications was usually discussed and negotiated at that meeting or a further meeting of the group.

### **The initial award**

Applications were called in June 1998 via the ACT and NSW Writers' Centres. They closed in mid September and 23 entries were submitted. The Advisory Group assessed the entries as being of high quality and welcomed the diverse nature of entries and in addition to the Award recipient identified three others for particular mention.

The Award of \$1000 was presented to **Sarah St Vincent Welch** by the Chief Minister and Minister for the Arts of the ACT, Mrs Kate Carnell at a ceremony in December 1998. She also announced that Belinda Lucky Alexandra's writing had been very highly commended, and that of Gabrielle Bates and Francesca Rendle-Short highly commended. Ken Eldridge then gave Sarah a carved wooden pencil holder, complete with sharpened pencils, honouring Marian's wish that this be part of the Award, and also a copy of each of Marian's four published books.

### **The second award, 1999**

In 1999 the Award was again \$1000, again open to applicants in the ACT and NSW, publicised through the two writers' centres, with the guidelines virtually identical. There were changes in the membership of the Advisory Group, however, which in 1999 comprised Ann Foley, Elizabeth Eldridge, Margaret Barbalet (writer and member of Canberra's Seven Writers), Konstantin Probst (long standing family friend) and Sarah St Vincent Welch (winner of the 1998 Award)

24 applications were received when entries closed in September. Notes prepared by the Advisory Group noted:

*Twenty-four entries were received, many from regional areas, from writers of diverse ages, backgrounds and interests. Entries included short stories, poetry, scripts for theatre, radio and TV, non-fiction essays, extracts from novels and stories for children.*

*The members of the Advisory Group, faced with such a rich pool of entries, had to engage in a thorough and interesting decision-making discussion. Individually, we were attracted to many of the entries. They were lively, imaginative, poignant, even bizarre at times. Finally we agreed on the winning entry because of the consistently engaging quality of writing and a distinct voice which was insightful and humorous.*

The Marian Eldridge Award for 1999 was presented to **Julie Simpson** by the Chief Minister for the ACT, Mrs Kate Carnell, at a ceremony in December. She also announced two highly commended entrants, Geraldine Mackenzie and Jan Dean, both of whom submitted poetry. Again, Ken Eldridge presented the winner with a hand carved wooden pencil holder and sharpened pencils, and Marian's published books.

### **The third award, 2000**

In 2000 the Award was again open to aspiring women writers in the ACT and NSW, guidelines for applicants remaining the same, as did the amount of \$1000. Following the practice of the previous year, Julie Simpson (the winner in 1999) joined the Advisory Group, as did another member of the Seven Writers, this time Marion Halligan. The other members were Ann Foley, Elizabeth Eldridge and Konstantin Probst.

The entries closed in September, this time 13 being received. The Advisory Group noted:

*In its third year the Award attracted poetry, novel extracts, short stories and writing for children. The entries were varied, and we felt that a number of the writers could have used the award well and deserve recognition. Highly commended applicants are:*

*Irma Gold, who demonstrated powerful and accomplished writing. In this case, her creative writing entry was both emotionally moving and sinister*

*Elaine Wilkinson, for her original and concise writing and compelling storytelling*

*Kristal Yee, who provided two very different extracts – one light and imaginative and the other a well constructed story conveying an adult dilemma*

*Carolyn van Langeberg, whose ambitious and expansive project introduced us to intriguing settings and characters*

The Award was presented to **Rose de Angelis** who submitted a story of a young Italian family. The Advisory group commented : *The extract charmed and engaged Advisory Group members. It conveyed intense childhood experience, changing family relationships, vivid incidents and hints of the longer family story to come. The Advisory Group feels Rose has a good appreciation of her potential and would use the award to seek assistance to develop her skills and continue her own hard work.* Marion Halligan, Chair of the ACT Writers' Centre, made the presentation at a ceremony in December 2000, and Ken Eldridge presented Rose with a hand carved wooden pencil holder, complete with sharpened pencils and Marian's books.

#### **The fourth award, 2001**

The arrangements in 2001 were very similar to those of the previous three years, the guidelines remaining the same, and applications closing in September. 18 entries were submitted in 2001. Again, the Advisory Group membership changed to some extent, this year with Ann Foley, Elizabeth Eldridge and Konstantin Probst being joined by David Eldridge and Racheal Bruhn, a Canberra artist and family friend.

The Advisory Group's comments were:

*In its fourth year, the Award again attracted novel extracts, short stories, poetry and writing for young adults. The entries were varied and we felt that a number of the writers could have used the award well and deserve recognition. Highly commended applicants are:*

*Irma Gold, previously commended in 2000, presented a fluent and evocative extract. She again impressed the advisory group with her commitment to writing and literary activity*

*Rosalie Hicks, a very new writer, with energy, directness and empathy*  
*Fiona Mcfarlane submitted intriguing and beautiful writing*

The presentation of the 2001 Award of \$1000 was made at a ceremony in February 2002, with Robert Hefner, friend of Marian and former literary editor of the Canberra Times making the presentation to **Elanna Herbert**. The Advisory Group's comments were *"Elanna's submitted extract "Frieda and the Cops" depicts a tense and dramatic scene. Her pen moves skilfully between the inner life of Frieda, dialogue of the cops and the play of children. The storytelling is immediate and vivid but also subtly explores potentials in and between the characters. Elanna's story described an ambitious short story project and her application showed a positive and well-organised approach to its completion.*

Like the previous Award winners, Elanna was also deeply appreciative of the carved wooden pencil holder with sharpened pencils and the set of Marian's books which Ken Eldridge presented to her.

### **The fifth award, 2002/2003**

In 2002 the Advisory Group of Ann Foley, Konstantin Probst and Racheal Bruhn, after consulting with the Eldridge family and the National Foundation for Australian Women, decided to offer the Award nationally. It was thus publicised through writers' centres in all states and territories. The value of the award remained \$1000 and the guidelines were similar to those of previous years.

The national competition attracted 77 entrants, from every state and territory. Although applications closed at the end of October 2002, there was a considerable delay in the Advisory Committee being able to make their assessment, mainly because of family tribulations during 2003. In mid 2003 the Advisory Group convener made an initial assessment and short-listed 30 of the applicants, all of whom were invited to confirm their continued interest in the Award and provide updated information about their intended use of the award. 29 applicants responded, confirming their continuing interest.

In January 2004, all short listed applicants were informed of the outcome of the final assessment by the Advisory group. Four entrants were highly commended:

Joan Beckwith  
Jane McGown  
Lorraine Marwood  
Natalie Sprite

The Advisory Group commented on the challenging job of choosing from a strong set of applications and noted the privilege of reading so many carefully crafted pieces of writing.

The recipient of the Marian Eldridge Award for 2002/03 was **Annah Faulkner**. The Advisory Group was impressed by Annah's substantial fiction project and by the evocative extracts she submitted. For this 5<sup>th</sup> Marian Eldridge Award the \$1000 prize was not presented at a ceremony in Canberra as had been done on previous occasions. Annah's cheque was sent by post, and a few months later when the NFAW Board met in Brisbane it held a cocktail party at which Annah, who lives in Peregian Beach, was the special guest. On Ken Eldridge's behalf, one of the NFAW Board members presented Annah with a carved wooden pencil holder and a set of Marian's books.

**Review : additional partners**

During 2004 Ann Foley, the key and longstanding member of the Advisory group, Ken Eldridge and Christine Goode (who on behalf of NFAW had handled all administrative arrangements) reviewed the arrangements for the Award. They considered that its five year history and the extent and quality of applications it had attracted had established it well in the writing community. The responses of those who had been highly commended, and in particular of the winners, indicated that it was clearly fulfilling the objective of encouraging aspiring writers. Whilst the amount of money in the preferred donor fund was not sufficient to be self sustaining (i.e. the capital was not large enough to finance an annual award from earnings), it was certainly sufficient to fund 5 to 10 further awards, depending on whether the amount of the award was increased to say \$1500.

The review group considered that the arrangements for the Award would be enhanced if some national and /or ACT institutions could become involved. It decided that the best way to approach this would be to seek institutional participation on an assessment panel, which as well as selecting the Award recipient, would be asked to advise the NFAW Board on future arrangements for the Award, including matters such as frequency of and amount of the Award, conditions of entry and whether applications would be sought nationally or geographic area.

NFAW would continue to hold the funds, handle the administrative work of calling for, receiving, scheduling and copying applications and providing them to the panel. NFAW would also handle the work of advising applicants of the outcome.

Marian's family would continue to nominate one or two members to chair an Advisory Group, in which NFAW and the assessment panel would also participate. Overall policy guidance and governance for the Award would be provided by this wider Advisory Group.

Late in 2004 three institutions agreed to participate by each nominating a member of the assessment panel. The institutions were the National Library of Australia, the School of Creative Communication at the University of Canberra and the ACT Cultural Council. Their involvement was expected to enhance the literary expertise of the assessments, and also contribute valuable strategic advice about the future of the Marian Eldridge Award.

**The sixth award 2005**

In consultation with the nominees of each of the above institutions, applications for the 2005 Award were called with a closing date of the end of May. 61 were received. The judging panel comprised Jennifer Webb (Associate Professor, School of Creative Communication, University of Canberra); Francesca Rendle-Short (nominee of the ACT Cultural Council) and Stephanie Green (nominee of the National Library). Both Francesca and Stephanie are writers themselves. The panel completed its assessment by the end of July and the award was presented in September.

The assessment panel commented:

*Entries covered a wide range of literary forms including adult fiction, poetry, memoir, children's and young adult fiction. The proposals came from women of all ages from around Australia, and reflected an interesting variety of life experiences.*

*In general the submissions showed a commendable vitality of imagination and enthusiasm for writing. The three judges also noted that the recent availability of creative writing courses is evidently a source of encouragement for many women in their writing.*

Three writers were commended by the judging panel:

Lucy Holt  
Natalie Sprite  
Marianne Vreugdenhil

The winner, **Caroline Lee**, was presented with a cheque for \$1,500 by Paul Hetherington, Chair of the ACT Cultural Council at a ceremony at the National Library of Australia in September.

#### **The seventh award 2006**

In 2006 97 entries were received, presenting a considerable challenge for the assessment panel. Jen Webb and Francesca Rendle-Short again participated on the panel, joined in this year by Kathryn Favelle as the nominee of the National Library of Australia.

*The panel commented that they saw every genre and form of writing being tried out, and that all entrants had the aptitude for writing, although in some cases they were not ready to tackle a major work or had not fully determined what form or what audience would be best suited to the piece.*

Four writers were highly commended:

Alison Brown  
Lyndel Caffrey  
Ally Collier  
Helen Gilfind

The winner for 2006 was **Nina Cullen**, who submitted a piece *Mothertongue*.. She intended to use the Award as a living allowance to start a first draft of her second novel and consolidate research she has done in Berlin.

#### **The eighth award 2007**

In this competition 76 applications were received. The judging panel again included Jen Webb from the University of Canberra, in the School of Creative Communication, and Kathryn Favelle from the National Library, joined by Maureen Bettle, the nominee of the ACT Cultural Council.

At the Award ceremony Maureen Bettle spoke on behalf of the panel about the selection process, saying:

*Earlier on in the process I had asked Kathryn what she looked for in sorting out the manuscripts and she replied 'Something different, something new'. This solves the question of comparing genre with genre. If the script gives one a little jolt of surprise then it goes in the list with the poem that as a poem achieves the same kind of freshness. The new for which we look is not a matter of startling subject matter as much as it is a matter of 'voice'. The writers whom we wish to foster (as I believe Marian Eldridge would wish to foster them) are those who are speaking for themselves as writers and expressing their own way of seeing the world with honesty and imagination.*

*Just as the work submitted varied in genre so also we discovered from the application material that the writers were at very different stages in their journeys. Some had an impressive number of publications of articles or short creative pieces: some had none*

Two writers were commended: Francesca Ciantar and Helena Pastor, each of whom submitted a short story. Highly commended by the judging panel were Lola Hill and Zoe Adler Bishop, Lola submitting an article which had been published, and Zoe extracts from several short stories.

The winner of the 2007 Award of \$1500 was **Glenys Osborne** who submitted extracts from a novel. This year the Award was enhanced by Varuna offering the winner significant discounts on their development programs for writers, and by the American journal *The Broadkill Review* undertaking to publish work from the winner and those who received commendations.

Paul Hetherington, Chair of the ACT Cultural Council presented the Award on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2007.

### **The ninth award 2008**

This year two of the panel of judges from 2007 again participated: Kathryn Favelle (nominee of the National Library of Australia and Maureen Bettle (nominee of the ACT Cultural Council). They were joined by Digby Wolfe, Adjunct Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Canberra.

The competition in 2008 saw 46 applications, from all states and territories except Tasmania. Victorian entrants dominated with 22; NSW and Queensland were the source of 8 each; there were 3 from WA, 2 each from SA and NT and 1 from the ACT.

Applicants submitted extracts from novels, short stories and poetry. The selection panel welcomed the poetry, much of which was enjoyable, but did not in the outcome include any amongst the leading contenders. One judge commented that it was relatively easy to write moderately successful verse but very hard to produce verse that was truly excellent.

The panel commented that this year there was some impressive writing in the third person voice, even though there continued to be a predominance of first person narrative, some of which did not entirely avoid the limitingly autobiographical. The panel noted strong imaginative characteristics in a lot of the writing. Many applicants

had had some publications, particularly in journals, and were clearly showing persistence and dedication.

Four applicants stood out from the field. All of these had submitted short stories. Annie Condon from Victoria was commended; Georgina Luck (Victoria) and Susan Murphy (NSW) were both highly commended; and **Jennifer Mills** (NT) was selected as the winner.

Again in 2008, the Award amount of \$1500 was supplemented by Varuna offering the winner discounts on its programs, and *The Broadkill Review* undertaking to publish work from the winner and those commended/highly commended. The Award ceremony was held at the National Library on 11<sup>th</sup> October, with Maureen Bettle making the presentation. The winner, Jennifer Mills was unable to be present as she was travelling in Cuba, but a message sent by her was read out by Marian Eldridge's oldest grandson, Tilden Eldridge. Jennifer said:

*Any writer owes her success to others. To the reader, foremost, but also to the many organisations and individuals who assist her to reach that reader. Most of these people and groups are relatively invisible, but without them we would not have such a vibrant literary culture in Australia.*

*Emergence is a slow and sometimes painful process. Marian Eldridge's work was recognised in awards from an early age, but her first short story collection did not appear until she was in her forties. Australian writing is not a big house but it is filled with many voices. It is not easy to make yourself heard. The only method I have found effective is simply to persist.*

*I am fortunately quite stubborn. I am also very pleased to announce that my debut novel *The Diamond Anchor* will be published by University of Queensland Press in April 2009...By coincidence, the novel's protagonist, May, was born in the same year as Marian Eldridge. The circumstances of my protagonist's life and of mine are very different. If it is easier for a woman of my generation to embark on a creative career, it is so because of the women who have come before her...*

*Without the support of awards such as the Marian Eldridge Award, that freedom to write would be meaningless. We often remember the room of our own, but forget the other half of Woolf's adage, that 'a woman must have money... if she is to write fiction.' And as Eldridge herself said, 'every little helps.'*

### **The tenth award 2009**

Ken Eldridge decided that the Award value for 2009 would be increased to \$2000. Varuna continued its support in agreeing to offer generous discounts to the winner should she choose to undertake any of its programs, and the *Broadkill Review* again agreed to publish work from the winner and those commended.

This year both Kathryn Favelle (nominee of the National Library of Australia) and Maureen Bettle (nominee of the ACT Cultural Council) again gave their time as members of the panel of judges. They were joined by Sarah St Vincent Welch

(nominee of the University of Canberra), who had been the first winner of the Award in 1998.

The competition attracted its largest number of applicants ever: 126 from all states and territories. Entrants from NSW (56) and Victoria (48) dominated, and as well included 14 from Queensland, 3 from WA, 2 from each of SA, Tasmania, the ACT and NT and 1 from Tasmania.

The panel of assessors commented that they found the standard overall higher than in recent years. There was a wide range of forms, themes and subjects. Applicants submitted extracts from novels, short stories and this year there was a good deal of poetry. Entries included a play, the first ever film script and non fiction of various kinds. The selection panel had commented in 2008 that it was relatively easy to write moderately successful verse but very hard to produce verse that was truly excellent. Last year no entrant was commended for poetry, whereas this year the panel commented on the much greater sophistication of the poetry entered, and poetry features in the commended work.

Assessors again noted some impressive writing in the third person voice, and a greater ability for writers to detach from the confessional voice and the limits of autobiographical writing. There was more political writing this year, and evidence of looking outward beyond an Australian frame of reference. Many applicants had had some publications, particularly in journals, and were clearly showing persistence and dedication.

Six applicants were selected as the leaders in this large high quality field. Four writers were commended: Ali Eckermann (SA) who submitted poetry; Kathleen Epelde (NT) who submitted an extract from a memoir; Jenni Nixon (NSW) who submitted poetry and an extract from short fiction; and Natalie Sprite (NT) who submitted an extract from a memoir. Highly commended was Jillian Pattinson (Victoria) for her extracts from a first collection of poetry.

The winner was **Jewelene Barrile** (Victoria) with her extract from a novel *Find Me*.

Paul Hetherington, Chair of the ACT Cultural Council presented the Award at a ceremony in Canberra on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2009.

It had been decided during the year that this would be the final Award, and the occasion was marked by the presence of several previous winners, some of Marian Eldridge's colleague women writers, Ken Eldridge and Marian's children David, Elizabeth, James and Catherine as well as 4 of her grandchildren.

#### **A decade of the Marian Eldridge Award**

Marian's family, the NFAW and those who have participated as judges, think that in its 10 years the Award has made a significant difference to those writers who have been the winners or received commendations. So many of them have let us know that the recognition has been an invaluable encouragement. For example, Marianne Vreugdenhill wrote to NFAW in March 2008, saying: *In 2005 I was commended for the*

*Marian Eldridge Award for an extract from my children's manuscript, Juliet Jones and the Worry Tree. Since then, I have been fortunate enough to find a publisher for this book. It was released by Random House Australia in July last year under my pen name, Marianne Musgrove. It was short-listed for the National Children's Peace Literature Award 2007 and the 2008 SA Festival Award for Literature. This, as you can imagine, has been a very exciting time for me.*

*As the NFAW played a part in encouraging me when I was an unpublished writer, I would like to thank you once again for your support in what is, largely, an isolated profession...I hope the Marian Eldridge Award continues long into the future, encouraging other women writers to "keep at it".*

In her speech at the presentation ceremony in October 2008, Maureen Bettle also recorded the views of some previous entrants:

I spoke before of the review of the Award that was undertaken in 2004 and how those involved judged of its success by 'the extent and quality of the applications it had attracted as well as by the responses of those who had been highly commended, and in particular of the winners', which 'indicated that it was clearly fulfilling the objective of encouraging aspiring writers'.

The encouraging takes many forms.

For **Sarah St Vincent Welch** (my friend at University of Canberra), who was the very first winner in 1998, the award was especially poignant. She had met Marian Eldridge. With typical kindness, Marian had visited her to drop off a prize, a book that Sarah had won as the 100<sup>th</sup> member of the newly formed ACT Writers Centre. Sarah therefore had met the woman whose works she admired and whose special form, that of the linked short story collection, was particularly significant to her ---and then she won the prize. It was something that she was to mention (as from my googling I find most winners do) when she gave a talk about her own work to the Fellowship of Australian Writers. When I asked what she spent \$1000 on, she said that it went on quality childcare that freed her to do research for her writing in the National Library.

For **Elanna Herbert**, winner of the 2001 Award, the experience was slightly different. In reply to my email Elanna said "receiving the Marian Eldridge award not only meant financial help to bring about the future publication of my collection of short stories once it was finalised, it also meant I could accept writing as a valid thing to do and go ahead and do it! The Award meant to me personally that I had received outside acceptance that what I was doing by writing stories in general and of my ideas for a possible future collection of short stories was OK. This acceptance by outsiders meant that I had support and the acknowledgement and validation of me as a beginning writer also allowed me to think that I would like to continue and to pursue a higher degree through my writing.

**Francesca Rendle-Short**, now an established writer and teacher of Creative Writing, was highly commended in 1998. I asked her what that meant to her. She told me that it was recognition coming to her from a woman and as a woman that enhanced her pleasure in being acknowledged as an author. Here, as in all the cases with which I am familiar, it is not the prize as such as much as the way in which recognition helps to make a woman feel that she has a right to spend her time and her energy in writing that is priceless.”

On hearing that the Award was winding up, a previous winner, **Annah Faulkner** who was the winner in 2003, sent her her heartfelt thanks to Ken Eldridge and everyone involved in the administration of the Award. She said:

Marian’s Award is the selfless gift of a writer who continues to nurture and develop Australian writers through the ripple effect of her bequest. For me, the monetary reward financed a week’s workshop with Kate Grenville – a hugely valuable and enjoyable experience. But the continuing value of the Award is in the recognition of one’s efforts. When things are going badly, when I seriously wonder whether I have a writer’s bone in my body, a small voice says I can’t be *that* bad if I won the Marian Eldridge Award. The manuscript I submitted has been extensively reworked and subsequently won the Varuna/Longlines Program in 2007. I’m still agonising over its final draft but in the meantime pursue other writing, some of which has been published in the North American Journal of Australian Literature, *Antipodes*. My manuscript has yet to be published. But Marian continues to push, and I continue to be grateful that she does. Thanks to everyone involved.

The 2005 winner, **Caroline Lee** sent a message greatly regretting that she could not be present at the final ceremony. She wrote:

On a practical level, winning the Marian Eldridge Award in 2005 gave me time, very very valuable time. I cut back on other work, sat down at my desk, and went quite a considerable way toward finishing a polished draft of my novel, "Stripped." I had just completed my studies at RMIT in the Professional Writing and Editing course, and so this precious parcel of time really allowed me to consolidate all the work I had done on the novel until that point.

I then got very busy with my acting work and set the novel aside for a while, which I was happy to do, as I felt it was done. My plan was to give it some space and then return with fresh eyes, complete a further draft, and then try and get it published. At the beginning of 2008, Sophie Cunningham, who had just taken over editorship of the literary journal "Meanjin" asked me to send her some of my writing. I sent a couple of short stories and two excerpts from my novel. She loved the novel and proposed that "Meanjin" serialise it. So this is indeed what has happened. The prologue of the novel was published in June 2008, (vol. 67, number 2), and each successive part of the novel in following volumes. Part Seven is due out this December, and the final two parts, eight and nine, in the first two volumes next year, 2010. Following this, I hope to get "Stripped" published as a whole.

It has been a wonderful experience. It has been fabulous to work with Sophie over such a long period of time, and I feel that the work has been thoroughly crafted and considered and is now very finely tuned - the work I imagined it to be all those years ago.

Also, as it has been going along I have had quite a large, if a bit sporadic, readership, and some excellent feedback, including a great review in the Griffith Review.

On a more personal level, winning the Marian Eldridge Award has been an immense encouragement. At the time of winning the Award it made me feel that my work and my vision had an appeal outside my immediate peer group and that it was certainly worth continuing.

I think it also consolidated and supported my sense of myself as a writer and kind of placed me within a tradition of Australian women writers. This feeling was made even stronger by the Award ceremony itself where I was welcomed and supported by all of the people associated with the Award, made to feel valuable, and also by being so warmly encouraged by Ken himself and being given the beautiful pencil holder and Marian's books. I am very grateful indeed for the Award, which has certainly made a great difference to my writing life so far, and will no doubt continue to do so in the future.

**Nina Cullen** who won in 2006 sent these comments in October 2009:

Thinking about the Marian Eldridge Award right now has an unexpected symmetry. When I received the award I had just returned from 6 months in Berlin, doing research for a novel. 3 years and 11 edits later I am about to start looking for an editor for that very novel.

Things move slowly in the land of writing and this is something that I have finally reconciled myself to over the past few years. My solution is to keep a few other projects cooking at the same time and not to let too much time pass between publications or recognition (such as a grant or award). Thus I've kept myself busy with journalism, short stories and the research for my next manuscript. The professional acknowledgement that comes from a grant like the Marian Eldridge Award, has been a great reassurance over this time to simply keep writing.

The 2007 winner, **Glenys Osborne** let us know that her novel was "finally" being published in late November 2009. She commented that it had been wonderful to win the Award, and expressed her gratitude "not only for the Award but also for the copies of Marian's books, and for the copies of the poems that she wrote while she was ill and that were read into Hansard. These last I found extremely moving and impressive: Marian was obviously quite a woman."

**Jen Mills**, the 2008 winner also sent a message for the ceremony of November 2009.

As for my writing, all is going wonderfully well. I'm working away at my second novel which is due to be finished early next year. I've just been

shortlisted for the Manchester Fiction Prize, which is very exciting - they had over 1700 entries. In 2010 I'll have a residency in Tasmania and am also off to Germany to collaborate on a poetry/dance project with choreographer Noha Ramadan. It promises to be a busy and interesting year.

I wish you all the best and thank you so much for your support. I hope Ken received his copy of *The Diamond Anchor*? [her novel published in 2008] I have been reading Marian's books you sent me and it is wonderful to have this connection with her work. I am sure the sight of them on my shelf will always be an encouragement.

Georgina Luck also let use know that she had had a wonderful time since being highly commended in 2008. She has had 3 stories accepted for publication, received a mentorship and won a new writers' prize. She sent her thanks for "giving me the opportunity to be part of such a wonderful, supportive project for writers."

### **The volunteers who sustained the Award over its life**

Ken Eldridge's constant interest and support has been invaluable, as has that of NFAW member, Christine Goode, who has contributed her time in handling the administrative work throughout the life of the Marian Eldridge Award, helped in the last 2 years by fellow NFAW member Helen Pilkinton. Ann Foley also gave a great deal of time in the early years of the Award, both on an Advisory Group and as a judge for the first 5 years.

The judging panel members have been generous with their time, a number participating over several years. The judges include many who are writers themselves, as well as Eldridge family and friends - those involved are shown below.

Name	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002/3	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Barbalet, Margaret		x								
Bettle, Maureen								x	x	x
Brownbill, George	x									
Bruhn, Racheal				x	x					
Eldridge, David				x						
Eldridge, Elizabeth		x	x	x						
Favelle, Kathryn							x	x	x	x
Foley, Ann	x	x	x	x	x					
Green, Stephanie						x				

Halligan, Marion			x							
Hefner, Robert	x									
Johnston, Dorothy	x									
Murphy, Lizz	x									
Probst, Konstantin		x	x	x	x					
Rendle- Short, Francesca						x	x			
St Vincent Welch, Sarah		x								x
Simpson, Julie			x							
Webb, Jennifer						x	x	x		
Wolfe, Digby									x	

The partner institutions, the National Library of Australia, the ACT Cultural Council and the University of Canberra have given vital support and their participation has enhanced the professionalism of the competition. Paul Hetherington who is both a senior member of the staff of the National Library and the Chair of the ACT Cultural Council has had a close and supportive involvement from the beginning and throughout the life of the Award.

Thanks thus to the Marian's inspiration and the willingness of so many to contribute, the Marian Eldridge Award has made its mark in helping many aspiring women writers.

On the winding up of the Award, Ken Eldridge decided to donate the balance of the money remaining in the Marian Eldridge Preferred Donor Fund half each to National Foundation for Australian Women and the ACT Writers' Centre.

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NOTE: The winning entry for each year and those which have been commended/highly commended are archived in the National Library of Australia with the historical records of the National Foundation for Australian Women. They are accessible to all.